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# THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE

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## HOW TO INTERPRET OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

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### STUDY VII

#### THE MESSIANIC KING

##### I. THE MESSIAH HIMSELF

We have now come to our closing study. It is not only the conclusion of the work for this course, but it ought also to be the climax. We are to study those passages that gather around the central figure of the kingdom. While the type is not always the same, the king is the most usual ideal. From very humble beginnings we shall seek to follow the growth of the idea and shall often be thrilled by the daring idealism of prophecy. Kingship has always been a favorite theme of song and eulogy, but never has there been more gorgeous imagery than that used in the Old Testament. Never were kingly ideals crowned with so much of the ethical and the distinctly religious. Sometimes, as we clearly see the historic setting, we may abandon old and highly prized interpretations. But we hope to find a more convincing and not less spiritual movement ever flowing toward the messianic king. The preparation for the Christ should become more realistic to us and in nowise less significant. A few studies that have already been before us will be again presented. This is because the ideas of the kingdom and of the king have often, very naturally, been found together. There will be real value in this repetition.

*First and second days.*—The word Messiah is not English but Hebrew. The idea that we today put into it is quite different from that which it signified in the Old Testament. “Anointed” is the best translation for the original word, which occurs 39 times. The following passages illustrate its use: I Sam., chapter 24, noting especially verses 6, 10; chapter 26, especially verses 9, 11, 16, 23; II Sam. 23:1—in all of these the word is used of the king. Pss. 2:2; 18:50; 89:39; 132:10, 17; II Sam. 22:51; and II Chron. 6:42 refer to the Davidic dynasty or a representative of it. In Isa. 45:1 Cyrus, the Persian king, is once called his anointed, or Messiah. In speaking of the anointed priest the writer of Lev. 4:3, 5, 16 uses the same word. It is clear that the term as used in the Old Testament applies to those anointed of God for certain great tasks on the earth, kings, princes, priests, rulers.

## II. THE KING OF ISRAEL AS THE CENTER OF THE HOPE

*Third day.*—§ 160. II Sam. 7:8-16. The history of the kingship in Israel runs back to the very beginnings of national life. Gideon was offered it, Judg. 8:22. Abimelech aspired to it, Judg. 9:1-6. Saul achieved it, I Sam. 10:1; 11:14, 15. But it was David who laid the foundation for a dynasty that was permanent and the basis for the most glorious hopes of the kingdom. He had the sanction of the most religious group in the realm, and was anointed by the prophet Samuel, I Sam. 16:11-13. Read now II Sam. 7:8-16. Long before this time David was firmly established on the throne, and the kingdom gave great promise for the future. He had been the leader in battle, and victory had ever attended his arms. He had developed the economic life of the kingdom, and temporal conditions had improved. He had introduced new social conditions, and many had basked in the light of the early court. He had been their judge, and strength had been tempered with mercy, and usually high and low had had equal justice meted out to them. Hence it is no wonder that the name of the great king finally became synonymous with the kingdom itself. This thought is definitely found in the last verse of the section. Thy house, thy kingdom, thy throne, is the burden of the hope.

*Fourth day.*—§ 161. Num. 24:17-19. An earthly king is the immediate object of the eulogy which we read in Num. 24:17-19. He is a warrior; he conquers Moab and takes Seir and Edom for a possession. The triumph is a national one over border enemies. The king is described in very glowing terms, "a star out of Jacob," "a sceptre out of Israel." We are not surprised at this phraseology. We know that kings who are in favor with the people are usually highly lauded. This was far truer in the Orient than in our own land. In a very remarkable way David won the favor of his people. He indeed had conquered Moab, Edom, and Seir, II Sam. 8:2, 13. This would all very appropriately apply to him or to some other one around whom hopes of great things were gathering.

We do not forget that many read this only in the light of Jesus as the Messiah. They find in it a direct prediction of him and his rule. But surely this is doing unnecessary violence to the whole context and phraseology, which compels us to read it in the local and national rather than the spiritual sense. This, however, cannot lessen for us the beauty of Him who was greater than David.

*Fifth day.*—§ 162. Isa. 7:10-16. Read from the beginning of the seventh chapter of Isaiah the story of the confederacy of Syria and northern Israel against Assyria and their endeavor to persuade Ahaz of Judah to join in a triple alliance against their common enemy. In Isa. 7:3-9, the prophet warns the king that he need have no fear of Syria and northern Israel, and that they are soon to perish.

Read now verses 10 to 16 and picture the scene, probably at the court of the king. The prophet points out a young woman of marriageable age, not necessarily a virgin so far as the Hebrew word indicates, who was to give birth to a child. Before this child shall be able to distinguish between the obviously good or evil, says the prophet, the two northern nations will be swept away. Was this child who was to be born, a son of the king, or of the prophet, or of some unknown woman? We have no answer. What is the significance here of "Immanuel"? The word means "God is with us." Does it signify God as a burning, scorching fire in judgment, verse 20, or God as a healing, delivering power? We do know that

later this name enshrined to many a great hope that a king would come who would so rule over his people that God would manifest himself to Israel.

*Sixth day.*—§ 163. Isa. 9:6, 7. Analyze each phrase so as to catch the full significance of the whole section Isa. 9:6, 7. It is a marvelous passage. No doubt the poet was heir to the best traditions of Israel and to the most glowing hopes for the Davidic dynasty. It may be that he had in his mind some young boy, a scion of the house of David perhaps, of unusual promise. The tenses are all perfects. "To us is born a child." The eight names that follow, or, better, four names, each a doublet, are to be taken as names given the child and indicating his character, not his origin. A strange name? But strange names were not uncommon in those days. Note Isa. 7:3; 8:1; Jer. 20:3, referring to the margin for the significance of these names. A name of wonderful significance? Yes indeed, but so were many others. Elijah means Jehovah is God. Hosea and Isaiah mean Jehovah saves. Strange names indeed for boys and men to carry around all their lives. Who merited such a name? A youth around whom the prophetic hopes gathered? No king of Israel ever realized this exalted conception of kingly duty and character. It was the prophets' ideal of the messianic king. What a justification of the prophets' idealism do we find in the fact that Jesus alone satisfies our sense of the essence of these significant names!

*Seventh day.*—§ 164. Isa. 11:1-5. With the overthrow of the dynasty and the apparent ruin of the time the prophet does not lose hope. Read Isa. 11:1-5. The Davidic dynasty is to the writer like the old stump of a fallen tree, from which, however, a new tree will grow up. The two phrases "A shoot out of the stock of Jesse" and "A branch out of his roots" mean the same thing. The prophet believes that surely as God is God, the high hopes of past generations, those ancient divine promises are not going to be defeated. Is the dawn of the night of the Israelitish captivity breaking? Does he see a movement among the nations which he takes as the sign of the working out of the divine purposes? Is he aware of some Zerubbabel, or someone unknown to us of the seed of David who gives promise of leadership? We have no definite answer to the foregoing questions. But we are sure that this prophet, whether Isaiah or another, had the overpowering conviction that God would raise up a man after His own heart, wise, reverent, and righteous, who would rule His people in wisdom and justice. This long-hoped-for king would be full of the spirit of Jehovah; he would be aware of the conditions of the people; he would judge, not according to the outer acts, but according to motives; in all his judgments he would be righteous.

*Eighth day.*—§ 165. Isa. 16:4, 5; 32:1. These passages express in a very quiet way the abiding confidence of Israel. We do not know all the shocks of history that had helped to shatter the dynasty of David. Petty kings who had been inadequate to their task and false to their God had been on the throne. Oppression by foreigners, overthrow, and captivity had apparently occurred. Read Isa. 16:4, 5; 32:1. Nationally all seemed lost. Yet the passion of the prophet patriots kept fresh the memories of the past and ever rekindled the glowing hopes of the future. Can you answer why?

*Ninth day.*—§ 166. Mic. 5:2-4. Bethlehem was the birthplace of David, I Sam. 16:1-13. Though it was small and insignificant it must share all the glory that might come to his descendants. Read Mic. 5:2-4. The people are scat-

tered, but the residue shall return, and under one of the descendants of the ancient house of David shall have dominion unto the ends of the earth.

*Tenth day.*—§ 167. Jer. 23:5-8; 33:14-17. Read the first passage. The Branch, who is to be of the seed of David, will be instrumental in bringing the exiles out of the north country, verse 8. This definitely relates the passage to the period of the exile and indicates the expectation of the return. The ruler is, however, ideally set before us, with characteristics that would be the perfection of kingly excellence and have never yet been the possession of royalty. Read also 33:14-17. All the hope we find spiritually realized in the "Prince of the house of David."

*Eleventh day.*—§ 168. Jer. 30:9-22. The deliverance from captivity is the dominant note, but Jer. 30:9-22 gives us an added element. The prince is to be definitely one of themselves. It looks as though this is a reaction against foreign domination or the usurpation of authority by one who was not an Israelite.

*Twelfth day.*—§ 169. Ezek. 17:22-24; 21:25-27. Ezekiel, who was one of the captives and who prophesied in Babylonia from 592-570, delights in figures and symbols. His meaning is usually easily ascertained. Read Ezek. 17:22-24. Jehovah himself will plant a tender twig that will ultimately become a great cedar. The reference is to a ruler, most naturally of the Davidic line, and is messianic. In the second passage, 21:25-27, Zedekiah, who was not in favor with the prophet, is the "deadly wounded, wicked one." From this hopeless régime the prophet looks to the future and believes that a prince, true in character, noble in achievement, and long promised of God, will come and rule over the people. Only to such a one does the right belong.

*Thirteenth day.*—§ 170. Ezek. 34:20-24, 31. Read the passage for the day and note that the figure of Ezekiel changes. The tenderness of the prince is emphasized. Owing to the suffering of the weak and diseased at the hands of the strong and the powerful the prophet looks forward to a true shepherd who shall feed and care for the flock. This shepherd will be of the Davidic stock.

*Fourteenth day.*—§ 171. Ezek. 37:15-28. The study for today is full of cheer. It is not very imaginative but is quite comprehensive. Read the passage. The prince is "my servant David." He is also the "one shepherd." Statutes and ordinances, covenant and sanctuary and tabernacle, are the chief interest of this prophet.

*Fifteenth day.*—§ 172. Ezek. 45:7-12; 46:16-18. In previous studies we will recall that the character of the ideal king was one in which righteousness and justice, wisdom and mercy, and all the finer social virtues were inherent. Read the sections for today and find a very different conception. Here we have to do with social legislation concerning the estate of the prince. The very practical writer of these passages conceives that regulations should be made that will effectively keep the prince in his place. There are limitations placed on his privilege of possession and entail. Compare this general attitude with that found in Isa. 9:6, 7; 11:1-5 (see sixth and seventh days).

*Sixteenth day.*—§ 173. Ezek. 45:13-17, 22-25. The whole Book of Ezekiel is essentially priestly. In no place is this more evident than in his treatment of the prince. Read Ezek. 45:13-17, 22-25. He must make the proper sacrifices. The ritualistic idea stands at the very center of the book, and the prince must take his place in this system. The priestly idea is the fundamental conception of the

section, and the prince plays only a very secondary part in the life of the community. In fact, as we read Ezek., chapters 40-48, the vision of the reconstructed religious life of the community, we find that the prince plays a very small rôle. As in an earlier study we found that Ezekiel left his impress on those who succeeded him and turned them toward the idea of worship, so here again we find that he laid the foundation of a priestly messianic ideal.

*Seventeenth day.*—§ 174. Hag. 2:20-23. Zerubbabel, a descendant of the house of David (I Chron. 3:19), has been chosen by Jehovah for a great mission. Hag. 2:20-23 tells us that he shall be as the signet ring upon the hand of Jehovah. In Jer. 22:24 we find Jeremiah denouncing the grandfather of Zerubbabel. Returning to Hag. 2:20-23 note how that which Coniah was to lose is to be regained by his worthy descendant. This promise was written about 520 B.C., and, as indicated in an earlier study, we have no record of its literal fulfilment.

*Eighteenth day.*—§ 175. Zech. 4:6-10; 6:9-15. In the first passage to be read Zerubbabel definitely proclaimed the hope of the struggling community. In Zech. 6:12 we are linked up with Jer. 23:5-8. The word used for Branch is the same. The prophet believes that the time has now arrived for the fulfilment of the words of his predecessor. In fact, the exile had been officially ended some twenty years before Zechariah began to preach. What is the chief religious interest in this study? How would the ideal compare with that of Ezekiel?

*Nineteenth day.*—§ 176. Hos. 1:10-11; 3:5; Jer. 17:25. One head is the constantly recurring thought found among a group of prophets. What theme runs throughout the foregoing passages?

*Twentieth day.*—§ 177. Zech. 9:9, 10. Jubilation over the coming king who will usher in the new era is ever the song on some devout lip. Read Zech. 9:9, 10 and note that the king is described as just, saved, victorious, and humble. Perhaps the last phrase of the ninth verse is the most familiar to us because of the New Testament parallel (Matt. 21:5). While the similarity in detail is striking, we should not fail to recognize that the true messianic connection is always something more significant and more spiritual than that which lies in the verbal correspondence or the superficial details.

### III. JEHOVAH HIMSELF THE CENTER OF THE HOPE

We have seen in Study VI that the tendency in apocalypticism was to disparage the idea that through natural forces there could be wrought any improvement in earthly conditions. Writers of this class believed that only by the direct interposition of God could there be the introduction of the kingdom of righteousness and prosperity. Thus it is quite natural that in all this literature the human king plays no part. Jehovah stands alone. He needs or uses no means to accomplish his ends. By his own arm he brings forth salvation. Hence no priest, no king, stands in the center of the hope for the apocalypticist. Jehovah is his own Messiah.

*Twenty-first day.*—§ 178. Jer. 46:18; 48:15; 51:57. Read these passages and observe that when the place of the king was desecrated by its occupant Jeremiah turns to the king whose name is Jehovah of hosts. This phrase served apocalypticism well in later days.

*Twenty-second day.*—§ 179. Zeph. 3:15-17; Obad. 1:21. Read Zephaniah 3:15-17; it is Jehovah the king of Israel who has cast out the enemy, who is in the midst, who casteth out fear, who will gather the sorrowful to the solemn assembly, and who will gather them back from captivity. Enumerate all the work that Jehovah is going to accomplish.

*Twenty-third day.*—§ 180. Isa. 33:2-6; 17:22. Jehovah is again the center of the stage. He is his people's strength, their warrior, their ruler in Zion, their treasure. He is the king in his beauty, the judge, the lawgiver.

*Twenty-fourth day.*—§ 181. Mic. 2:13; 4:7. Read and see how these apocalyptic glimpses are in keeping with the foregoing. Jehovah alone is competent for the task of restoration and reformation.

*Twenty-fifth day.*—§ 182. Zech. 14:9-17. Jehovah is to rule over the whole earth. Read Zechariah's statement in 14:9-17. He will smite the peoples with the plague and shall receive the homage of all the nations of the earth.

*Twenty-sixth day.*—§ 183. Isa. 24:21-23. Again it is Jehovah, Jehovah, Jehovah. He will reign in heaven and on earth. When we compare the hope for a king of the Davidic stock with the conception of Jehovah as king, which is the prominent idea throughout this section, we recognize that we have two types of thought. One builds its ideals and hopes around human institutions with which the prophets and people were familiar, representing God working through means, establishing his kingdom through a vicegerent who was purified and strengthened. The other, the apocalyptic, has no faith in such processes. It has fallen on evil times. It despairs, as well it might, of all that is human. Both are optimistic, but from different standpoints. The one has confidence in the power of God working within things as they are and ultimately producing the desired end. The other has faith that things will be right because God will work by extraordinary means. In the one we find the hope that the channels will be purified, and also the note of social justice that lays the basis for the messianic kingdom. In the other, that God must manifest himself in external ways, but with complete success. Thus, while widely different in outlook, both have a real messianic message.

#### IV. THE REDEEMER, THE CENTER OF THE HOPE

Much material might have been gathered under this title. In one form or another all the messianic passages have some thought of redemption. Deliverance from enemies, restoration from captivity, overthrow of world-powers, and the renovation of the earth are all redemptive ideas. This is ever a central feature of the hope. But there are a few passages that because of popular interpretation deserve special mention here.

*Twenty-seventh day.*—§ 184. Isa. 59:15-20. In the thought of the writer of Isa. 59:15-20 Jehovah stands alone as the savior of his people. His own arm will bring salvation. He is the warrior. He dons the armor. He recompenses the enemy. He is the redeemer of Zion. Jehovah the Holy One of Israel, thy redeemer, is a very common thought in exilic and later literature (see Isa. 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 60:16; 63:16).

*Twenty-eighth day.*—§ 185. Job 19:23-27. In the word today we step aside from prophecy for a moment. Read Job. 19:23-27. The word used here

for redeemer, *go-el*, had a long history before the writing of this book. According to an ancient custom the near kinsman had the right to redeem the possessions or persons of his relations by making payment equivalent to the debt, and stipulated increase thereon, for which they had been sold. Later the one who because of kinship had the right of purchase was called the redeemer, or *go-el*. Perhaps the best translation for the word in our study is "Vindicator." The context would support this meaning. Job is the center of a great tragedy. His possessions and his family are wiped out. His body is afflicted with a sore plague. Worst of all, his friends insist that his suffering is the direct result of his sin. This was the accepted theology of the day, but Job knowing his own innocence argues, challenges, and defies. Then with a flash of insight he seems to turn from his consolers to the court of final appeal and thrust himself on the wisdom of God. "I know that my Vindicator liveth" is the challenge of his innocence to his accusers. For the rest of the verse the text is very much confused, so that we cannot be positive of a translation. But this confidence in a personal Vindicator who was wise and just and who cared for the individual is a landmark in the history of Old Testament thought.

*Twenty-ninth day.*—§ 186. Zech. 12:10-12. This passage has had a strange history. A single word of verse 10, "pierced," has been singled out from all the rest of the passage. With the New Testament fact in mind it would scarcely have been possible to have done otherwise. But the piercing was a fact that already lay in the past to the prophet. He is indeed looking forward, but it is to the outpouring of the spirit of grace, repentance, and humility. The vagueness of the reference gives us little clue to the historical background. Had some great prophet suffered martyrdom, and would the people look on him in contrition? Was it the pious nation, the "suffering servant," who is here personified and looked on in a new significance? Is it to be recognized by a later generation that those who suffered in the exile were the elect, and that it was through them that light and healing would come to the nation? We can only be sure that here we have a note of hope.

*Thirtieth day.*—§ 187. Isa. 52:13-53:12. In an earlier study (114) we considered the passage assigned for today and found that this was an explanation of the suffering of exiled Israel. Thus it had a very vital message for the people who first heard it. But there is another side. It expresses a universal principle. It is the most significant chapter on redemption in the Old Testament. It unhesitatingly teaches vicarious sacrifice. Note the various phrases: "He hath borne our griefs"; "He was wounded for our transgressions . . . with his stripes we are healed"; "Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"; "He bare the sin of many." All indicate that he gave his life for others, and that that sacrifice was of redemptive value. This is no mere theory of the atonement. It is a statement of the vital fact. It is everyday experience. The soldier who dies for and saves his country, the fireman who dies for the one whom he rescues from the flames, the mother who gives her life for her child, all have suffered vicariously and redemptively. This is valid in all true service and is wrought into the fabric of all human life. It was pre-eminent in the Christ. It is a universal principle. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit."



*Summary.*—With the conclusion of this study we may look back over the whole and ask the question, What is the relation of the Old Testament to Jesus? Have we in our studies found that from the phrases and words of the Old Testament we could gain a clear and detailed conception of Jesus or of his program? Does the Old Testament tell us anything about his personal appearance, his height, his complexion, or any of his physical features? A face “more marred than the sons of men,” you say? But surely that is not a statement of outward appearance. We have not so painted him or imagined him. The fact is we know nothing of him from the physical standpoint. Does the Old Testament then tell us much about his earthly career? Does it tell us his name, his birthplace, his occupation, or anything definite about his public ministry? A few passages have been interpreted as answering some of these questions in the affirmative. But if all that are so used were used correctly they would give us no adequate glimpse into any phase of his life or death. The further fact is that when we closely inspect the passages referred to they give us so little that must necessarily be applied to him that we have scarcely an assured detail.

What then is the connection? Jesus used the Old Testament writings and found them pointing to himself. “These are they that testify of me” indicates his attitude. If we had time to study Christ’s use of Scripture we would be convinced that he thought of something deeper and more important than any verbal coincidences between the words of the prophets and his own acts and doings. The relation is not verbal, it is vital; it is not formal, it is inner. Those great movements that flowed on through the centuries move toward their perfection in him. The ideals which were wrought out in the struggle of experience by men who were in fellowship with God find their incarnation in him who was the Son of God. Those perennial hopes and constant outbursts of faith in God were kindled and fed by the same spirit which worked in him in perfection. The prophetic idea of the king was the expression of an idealism to which he was the only answer. The kingdom of their dreams, where justice reigned, prosperity abounded, and God alone was revered, he inaugurated. The visions of the apocalypticists, with the glorious triumphs of the righteous through the power and the presence of God, are the ultimate goal to which his kingdom is moving. Thus the various currents coming from prophets, early and late, from priests and sages, from psalmists and apocalypticists, all flow toward him. The spirit and the ideal of the Old Testament enables us to gain a greater appreciation of the character, the service, and the salvation of the Christ. All this is messianic, and he is the Messiah.

A final word may be permitted. A great deal of material has been worked over by the student in this course. The elements have been quite heterogeneous. Our prophetic books are not in chronological order, and the arrangement of the material may sometimes have proved confusing. The writer fears that some may have failed to gain very clear ideas as to the whole movement of prophecy. He would suggest that the work should be again gone over carefully. Such a process is always necessary for examination and is always helpful to the student. With the review of the work the student will gain a better perspective of the whole. He will grasp the valid principles of interpretation better. The writer ventures also to hope that each student will find a richer ethical and religious message and a more vital and truer messianism in Old Testament prophecy as the result of this course.

## QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What does the word Messiah mean?
2. How is the word used in the Old Testament?
3. Trace the early history of the kingship in Israel.
4. What king gained peculiar pre-eminence in the thought of Israel? Why?
5. Where are the most ideal characterizations of the king found? What are they?
6. What significant term does Jeremiah use of the coming king?
7. What are the characteristics of Ezekiel's prince?
8. Compare the differences between the ideal set forth in Isaiah and that in Ezekiel.
9. Account for those differences.
10. Who placed great hopes in Zerubbabel? How were they expressed?
11. What significance do you put in Zech. 9:9?
12. What group of writers looks on Jehovah especially as king? Why this attitude?
13. What are the characteristics of apocalyptic literature? In what books do we find this type of literature?
14. What is the meaning and the history of the word *go-el*?
15. Interpret, "I know that my redeemer liveth."
16. To whom does the following sentence refer, "They shall look on him whom they have pierced"?
17. Where is the idea of vicarious sacrifice found in the Old Testament? Where in life?
18. The Old Testament testifies of Jesus. In what way?
19. Which would be the greater, to fulfil an ideal to the letter or in the spirit?
20. What principles ought to guide us in the interpretation of Scripture?